

The Dance

Betty Winn Fuller

IT HAD started out like any other Charity Ball—except that for the first time in three years Jo Anne had a new formal. It was a dream of a dress, pale green nylon that matched her eyes, a tight black velvet belt that pointed up her small waist. She knew it was perfect for her; she looked like a fairy princess.

Getting the children to bed had been an ordeal, as was usual when she and Dick went out. Tonight when they saw the new dress, they could hardly contain themselves. "Oh Mommy, you look beootiful," four-year-old Kathy exclaimed, dancing round and round in her pink sleepers.

"Thank you, darling," Jo Anne murmured absently. She kissed the elfin face. "Now run brush your teeth so Mommy can finish getting dressed."

She turned in time to see Janie making off with her pearl earrings. In the ensuing chase, Janie dropped one of them, and they were all down on their knees searching when Dick returned with the sitter.

"Aren't you ready yet, Honey? We're late now." He retrieved the earring from behind the couch, and took Tommy and Kathy in to brush their teeth, leaving her to explain the bedtime rituals to the sitter. Why do we always get a talkative one when we're in a hurry, she wondered, smiling politely at the sitter's account of her grandson's latest escapade. She finally got away and hurried to finish dressing, one eye on the clock, an ear cocked for the reaction of the children to the new sitter.

When she bumped against the doll buggy parked in the middle of the floor, she saw with dismay the run darting down her stocking. She was hunting frantically through her drawer for another pair when Dick appeared again.

"For heaven's sake, Jo Anne, hurry it up, will you? What in the world have you been doing?"

"I've been hurrying. Can I help it if the kids leave their things all over the house for people to fall over?" she answered between clenched teeth.

"Well get a move on, or we'll miss the whole dance. I can't understand what takes you so long. I've been ready for hours," he muttered as he went back to the living room.

Yes, Jo Anne thought, but you didn't have to feed three children and get them ready for bed while you were trying to get your self dressed either. Her Irish temper rose. Stop it, she told herself viciously. You're not going to start off your big evening on the wrong foot again.

"Dick, have you seen my evening bag?" she called. "It was right here a minute ago."

He instinctively looked for Janie, who was under the dining room table with evening bag and contents spread all over the floor. He brought it to her with a disgusted look. "Will you ever learn to put things up where she can't get them? I should think you'd know by now."

"Well maybe if you'd keep the kids out of here for five minutes, I could manage to get dressed."

"Oh sure, it's all my fault, as usual. Why is it whenever we go out, you always get in a bad mood. You're jumping down my throat before we even get to the front door. Just once I'd like to start out calmly. If you'd only organize your time, you wouldn't be so upset at the last minute."

She stifled a sharp retort, knowing how he hated to talk to sitters. Somehow they got out, to the accompaniment of Janie's heartbroken wails at being left behind. They rode to the dance in stiff silence.

When they reached the country club, however, Jo Anne's spirits rose. This is one night I'm going to forget I'm a harried mother of three, and really enjoy this dance, she told herself as she recombined her hair in the powder room. The place was alive with color—beautiful dresses, sparkling sequins, exotic perfumes mingled to provide an atmosphere of gaiety in the crowded room. Then they went into the ballroom and Jo Anne caught her breath. The decoration committee had outdone itself. The theme of the dance was Paradise Island, and they had truly created a paradise. Artificial palm trees lined the walls, and behind the orchestra was a breathtakingly beautiful mural of blue green waters lapping a sandy beach. The orchestra was a Hawaiian band, colorfully attired in native dress—complete with flowery leis. The poignant melody of the guitar swayed the dancers gently as if a tropical breeze rippled through them. The lights were dim, and a circular, revolving chandelier threw little rainbow colored discs of light around the dance floor—like beautiful, iridescent butterflies weaving in and out among the dancers.

After half an hour of dancing, Jo Anne had forgotten all her irritation. She was as detached from it as if it had never happened. When someone tapped her partner on the shoulder and she looked up into the smiling brown eyes of an absolute stranger, she was not even surprised. His next words, instead of seeming strange, so fitted her mood that it was almost as if she had expected them.

"You're beautiful," he murmured. "I saw you all the way across the room and knew that I had to dance with you. Tell me your name."

"Jo Anne—"

He interrupted quickly. "Not the last name. My name's Craig." He smiled down, and she knew she had never seen a more handsome man. His face was darkly tanned, and his teeth shone so white they were almost unbelievable. His dark eyes crinkled as he grinned at

the wedding ring on her left hand. "You probably have ten kids and a vile temper, but don't disillusion me. This is Paradise Island and I've found an angel. At midnight she'll be gone like Cinderella, but it's a long time till midnight."

She could not help entering into the game. The music and dim lights—her own mood of detachment made her receptive to his mood. "You make lovely speeches, Prince Charming," she murmured against his shoulder. They were silent then as the music swirled about them. She had never been a good dancer, but now her feet seemed light, and they almost floated on the waves of the strumming guitar music. She did not try to follow his lead, she just moved with him instinctively, effortlessly, as if they had danced together for years. His arms about her felt warm and strong.

She smiled up at him. "It must be those two scotch and sodas I drank so fast, but I feel as if I really were Cinderella. I don't seem to have any other life—as if this were the only time and place that existed for me."

"I know," he answered, "I feel that way too. Let's just pretend it's true—that we are two people who came into existence here on this dance floor. Don't tell me anything about yourself. Pretending is easier that way." Then after a little while, he spoke again. "You know, don't you, that every man has a secret dream girl? As the years go by, she fades, until he can remember only a few things about her—the color of her hair, the smell of her perfume. Tonight I saw my dream girl, and suddenly I remembered that her eyes were almost green, her hair was long and honey colored, and her nose turned up a little. It's funny how it all came back to me when I saw you."

They danced on and on. When the music stopped at intermission, they talked—about their dreams, the hopes and fears they'd had. He held her hand and she felt about sixteen again—gay, laughing, a little daring. Never once did they refer to their present lives. She did not even know whether or not he were married, and she didn't care. This was a stolen moment, snatched from daily life and set apart from it. She caught sight of Dick several times and knew by his grin that he was enjoying himself.

The time passed as in a dream—the dimness of the room, the languor of the music and setting gave it an unreal quality. It seemed as if they had been dancing forever, and yet again, it seemed only a moment. Jo Anne remembered things she had not thought of for years—the thrill of her first kiss, the fraternity serenade the night she took Dick's pin, her wedding day—precious memories that had long been crowded out by the everyday hurry of her busy life.

Before they knew it, the strains of "Goodnight Sweetheart" were starting, and Jo Anne saw Dick coming toward her.

"It's been wonderful, Craig," she said. "I've enjoyed every minute on Paradise Island."

"Goodnight, JoAnne, I'll always remember this night." Then he drifted off and was lost in the crowd.

"Did you have fun, Honey?" Dick asked as they danced to the muted strains of the last dance.

"Oh Dick, it was a wonderful dance."

"I hope I didn't neglect you, Darling, but you know me and dancing," he grinned. "Anyway you seemed to be enjoying yourself. Joe's brother is a nice guy, isn't he?"

"Yes, yes, Dick, he's a nice guy." She could have said, "I'll never forget him," but Dick wouldn't have understood. She knew, though, that something had happened to her tonight, something important. For the first time in years, she had felt like a woman again—beautiful, desirable. I've been so busy being an efficient wife and a good mother that I've forgotten all about being a woman, she thought in astonishment. Tonight I remembered again, and it's a good feeling. I won't let myself forget again, ever.

She brushed her husband's cheek with her lips, and his arms tightened about her.

Treasure Room

Caroline Yakey

MILTON's room is a jumble of old furniture and exciting treasures. These treasures, which are more important than the furniture, can be found in corners, sticking out of drawers, hanging from lights and on the tops of things.

In one corner there are many different sizes and styles of bats and toy rifles, and various items used for dog torture. In another corner of the room there is a wastebasket. It is not really a wastebasket though, but a target into which Milton throws rolled-up socks. On top of his monstrous antique dresser he has only the most necessary items: a comb and a brush, a picture of Jesus, and a gun. Sticking out of the dresser drawers are old ropes, tee-shirts, arithmetic papers, and string. The scratched up bookcase is another place where he keeps valuable things. This is the home of his flashlight, "precious" rubberbands, and children's books, battered and torn.

Two walls in his room are bright blue, and the other two are a cheerful yellow. They were painted these colors at Milton's request. On closer observation one will find that the walls are covered with small patterns of dirty fingerprints, childish scribbling, and ball marks.

There are several throw rugs tossed casually about the room. For about fifteen minutes after the room is cleaned each day the rugs are spread out neatly and orderly as rugs should be. But because of the whirlwind manner of the vast number of little men who visit this room, the rugs always end up twisted into little heaps.

Milton's room is a hodge-podge, a museum of many items that most people would classify as junk. But Milton tenderly and proudly cares for them because this is his storeroom of treasures, his private world of happiness.